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# Policy for physical education and school sport in England, 2003-2010: Vested interests and dominant discourses

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(Received

*Background:* The salience of physical education and school sport in England changed dramatically in the 2000s in terms of central government investment and political interests. The government put in place the Physical Education and School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) strategy and the Physical Education and Sport Strategy for Young People (PESSYP) for a wide-ranging array of social objectives. Although policy research relating to PESS has centred on the sport policy-making process and the role of government or agents including teachers has been growing from the 2000s, this paper argues for the need to explore the social construction and constitution of school knowledge underpinned and influenced by particular dominant vested interests and their associated discourses to understand certain pedagogical implications for young people.

*Method:* Applying the educational policy sociology approach adapted from Basil Bernstein's work on the social construction of pedagogic discourse, the focus of this paper was to identify the main discourses which constructed and constituted policy for PESS from 2003-2010 in England. Qualitative content analysis on six policy documents and 467 media articles was conducted.

*Findings:* This paper identifies five discourses constructing and constituting policy for PESS during the period under study: sport, health, citizenship, lifelong participation and Olympic legacy. These are sources of policy for PESS that were constructed in Bernstein's recontextualising field. This paper also seeks to show the complexity of policies and strategies for PESS in that they are anchored in web of significations in terms of complex connections between elements of discourses. It can be argued that as a structure-in-dominance, policy for PESS reinforced competitive sport-based conceptions of physical education and, arguably, created a limited universe of possibilities, of what was thinkable, for and as PESS.

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*Conclusions:* This paper argues that the inclusions and exclusions of discourses from policy for PESS are all politically charged, and will have an impact on the quality of young people's education and their life chances in the future. Furthermore, this paper proposes that we need to explore in further depth the processes of how to maximise the possibilities of realising quality PESS in order for young people to learn citizenship, foster health improvement and facilitate lifelong participation in physical activities.

**Key words:** Discourse; Social construction of knowledge; PESSCL; PESSYP; Physical education and school sport

## **Introduction**

Concerns about a decline and marginalisation of physical education in schools led to increased government intervention across most countries of the world. Policies for physical education have been integrated into government's broader social objectives centred on education, sports and health (Phillpots and Grix, 2014) In particular, the first decade of the 2000s was arguably one of the most significant for the development of policy for physical education and school sport (PESS) in England in that it was during this period that central government invested a considerably large amount of public funding to establish a new and extensive infrastructure for PESS, through Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) strategy (latterly, Physical Education and Sport Strategy for Young People (PESSYP)) (Phillpots 2013). The PESS policy area in England has, as a result, become an even more complex policy space since Houlihan's (2000) publication which first referred PESS policy area as 'crowded policy spaces', where a range of interests, groups and discourses can be identified (Houlihan and Green 2006).

There have been several studies undertaken to aid understanding of the sport policy-making process and change relating to physical education (Houlihan and Green 2006; Phillpots

2013), and of the significant role of government (Phillpots and Grix 2014) or agents including teachers (Flintoff 2003) and coaches (Smith 2013) for policy implementation. These studies provide valuable perspectives on understanding a range of aspects of the policy process, policy implementation and policy decision-making centred on agenda-setting, policy-making, and policy delivery. Building on the important insights this initial policy research has produced for PESS, this study attempts to provide some further ways of understanding policy relating to PESS underpinned by Basil Bernstein's (1990) theory of social construction of pedagogic discourse, in order to highlight the social construction and constitution of school knowledge.

Bernstein's approach to educational policy sociology is particularly helpful in policy analysis in terms of investigating relations between categories of knowledge produced by agents and agencies at different levels and in different sites (Penney and Evans 1999). This perspective foregrounds the belief that policy for PESS is constructed and constituted by dominant discourses through particular struggles and contestation among vying groups, and as such is also consistent with Goodson's (1990) theory of the social construction of school subjects and university disciplines. In this sense, the notion of *discourse* allows this study to highlight the implications of the construction of pedagogic discourse for teaching and learning practice embedded within the selected dominant discourses, and the social relations of power in terms of 'who controls what' (Apple 2002, 607). This study is focused on the 'what' rather than the 'who'. In other words, this study is concerned with what discourses embedded in policy for PESS were dominant during the first decade of the 2000s in order to make it possible for us to map the universe of possibilities for the *practice* of PESS, of what is thinkable *as* PESS.

The primary purpose of this paper is to identify dominant discourses constructing and constituting the main strategies for PESS from approximately 2003 to 2010, within PESSCL

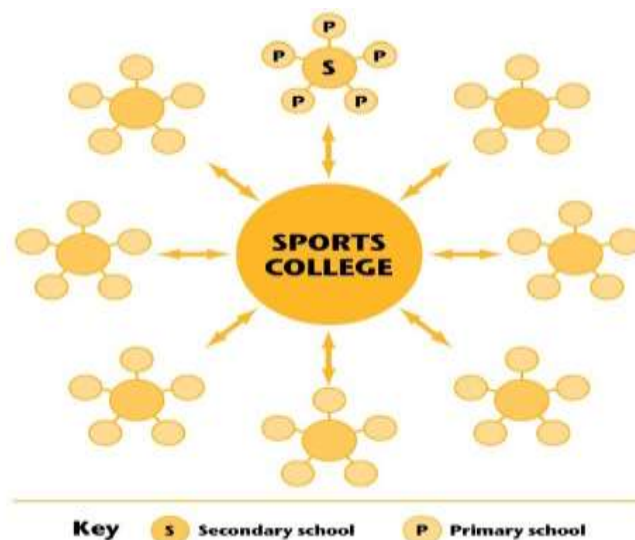
and PESSYP. This paper begins by reviewing PESSCL/PESSYP as a centre-piece of sport development in the 2000s. After foregrounding Bernstein's work on the social construction of pedagogic discourse and overviewing the methodology employed, our findings identify major discourses and consider their meaning for the construction and practice of PESS.

### **The New Labour government priorities for physical education and school sport: PESSCL/PESSYP**

The landscape of PESS in England changed dramatically in the 1990s and 2000s in terms of central government investment and political interests (Houlihan and Green 2006). In this context, former Prime Minister Tony Blair regarded physical education and sport as a valuable tool for education enhancement, which not only maintained its political salience, but also meant PESS emerged as a significant cross-departmental vehicle for the administration's broader social policy objectives such as adding to social cohesion and improving health (Houlihan and Green 2006). With a burgeoning and increasing salience of youth sport policy in the 2000s, the PESSCL strategy emerged as a significant youth sports development policy initiative.

The PESSCL strategy was designed to deliver a joint Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) programme under a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target. The PESSCL strategy initially included eight separate strands of work: Specialist Sports Colleges (SSC), School Sport Coordinators (later subsumed within the School Sport Partnerships), Gifted & Talented, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) PE & School Sport Investigation, Step into Sport, Professional Development, School/Club Links, and Swimming. At the heart of the PESSCL and PESSYP were Specialist Sports Colleges (SSCs) and School Sport Partnerships (SSPs). SSCs had a

key role to play in raising standards of teaching and learning in PESS and to achieve sporting excellence in terms of widening the base of participation of sport activity and providing good coaches (DCMS 2000). Under PESSCL and PESSYP, SSPs were the key driver to offer young people high quality sport opportunities within and beyond the curriculum (DCMS, 2003). As can be seen in Figure 1, the typical model of SSPs was a family of schools, a cluster of secondary and primary schools centred on the SSC.



**Figure 1 The preferred model of the School Sport Partnership (DfES & DCMS, 2003, 6)**

The overall objective of PESSCL (DfES & DCMS, 2004) was to achieve the following PSA target:

Enhance the take-up of sporting opportunities by five- to 16-year-olds by increasing the percentage of school children who spend a minimum of two hours each week on high quality physical education and school sport within and beyond the curriculum from 25% in 2002 to 75% by 2006 (p.1).

Success in meeting and indeed surpassing this target was evidenced in increase in the

percentage of students participating in two hours of PESS, from 25% in 2002 to 86% by 2007, with a further aim for children to have access to at least four hours of physical education and sport each week by 2010 (Phillpots 2013).

In line with these targets, central government was later working (2008) to deliver PSA 22 through PESSYP which set out an even more ambitious success measure referred to as the 'five hour offer'. PESSYP built on the work of PESSCL with support from an investment of £783 million to improve the quality and quantity of physical education and sport undertaken by young people aged 5-19 (Sport England and Youth Sport Trust 2009). However, after the election of 2010 a Coalition government formed between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats replaced the Labour government which had introduced the PESSCL and PESSYP strategies. In October 2010, the Coalition government announced the decision to cut school sport ring-fenced funding including PESSYP infrastructure and its work strands by the end of March 2011. Nevertheless, despite the abrupt change of policy direction this decision initiated, this period of intensive government investment in PESS during the 2000s remains of considerable interest. This is because it provides us with key insights into the process of socially constructing policy in which particular priorities for PESS sponsored by particular vested interests become visible.

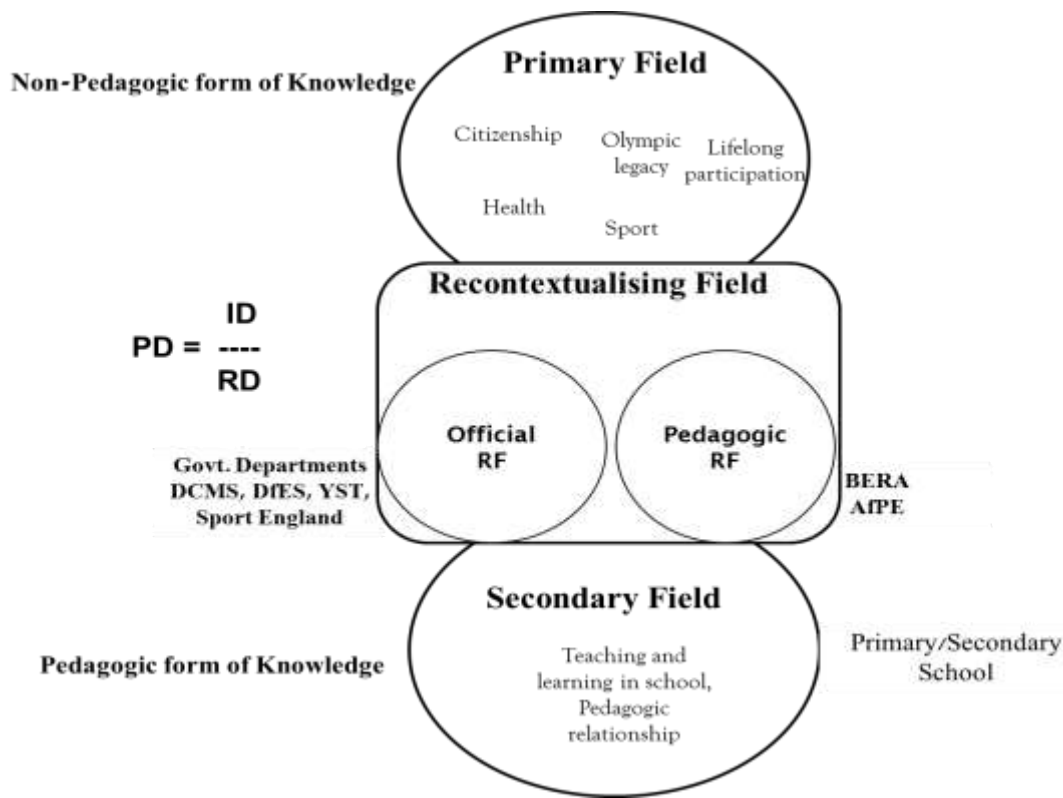
### **Theoretical considerations: Bernstein and the social construction of pedagogic discourse**

Bernstein's work served as a useful theoretical underpinning for the research in terms of providing a lens to understand the nature and complexity of the formation of government sports policy and its part in the social construction of school knowledge. Bernstein (1990) produced a theory of social and educational codes and their effect on the reproduction of society. Specifically, Bernstein proposed a model of the relationships between meaning-

making processes at a range of levels within educational systems and other regulatory institutions and practices that take place within and between sites of the production of meaning. By using Bernstein's work, physical education researchers attempt to provide a means of making effective strategic interventions in practice, particularly in maximising the benefits of those moments offered by education policy change and reform in the field of school physical education. For example, Penney and Evans (1999) argued that there seemed to be little change in physical education since the introduction of National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE) largely because curriculum provision in physical education still focused disproportionate attention on a narrow range of competitive team games.

Bernstein identifies three fields for the production, reproduction and recontextualising of knowledge as shown in Figure 2. In the primary field, new knowledge is constructed, developed and positioned in terms of distributive rules. Bernstein regards the primary field as the place in which the 'unthinkable' becomes reality and where new knowledge is constructed in disciplines such as law, medicine and human movement studies, from universities, research institutes or individual research normally funded either privately or by the State.





**Figure 2 The three fields for the production, reproduction and recontextualising of pedagogic discourse**

As such, a range of discourses around PESS such as obesity, elite sport, volunteering and other discourses are generated in the primary field. These discourses are non-pedagogic forms of knowledge and the knowledge is then reworked or translated by an agency into policy documents, strategies and initiatives. In the secondary field, there are various organisations and agencies who engage in the selective reproduction of educational discourse determined by evaluative rules (Bernstein 1990). The secondary field is centrally concerned with the reproduction of knowledge and this work takes place mainly in educational institutions and in this case in primary and secondary schools.

The recontextualising field is located between the primary and secondary fields, the agents of which are concerned with the movement of discourses from the primary context of knowledge production to the secondary context of reproduction, involving what is at root a process of pedagogisation of discourse (Singh 2002). Substantively, the major activities of the

recontextualising field are creating, maintaining, changing, and legitimising discourse, and the transmission and organisational practices which regulate the internal orderings of pedagogic discourse. Bernstein (1990) defines pedagogic discourse as the rule or principle for embedding and relating two kinds of discourse: the ‘instructional discourse’ (ID) of specific school subjects; and ‘regulative discourse’ (RD) which refers to the discourses which create social order, relations and identity within a subject-field. RD is concerned with the dominant discourse or principle of society, so produces the order in the ID, that is, instructional discourse is a manifestation of certain regulative discourses (Tinning 2010). Consequently, the ID is *embedded* in the RD in terms of teaching and pedagogical practice within the institutional policy of educational programmes (Bernstein, 1990). In specifically Bernsteinian terms, the aim of this study is to examine and identify a range of the discourses forming RD in policy for PESS which will be the basis of pedagogic discourse in school through the construction of various versions of the ID of PESS.

The interface between the primary and recontextualising fields is of fundamental importance to our understanding of how government sports policies and strategies are made, through tracing which elements of discourse produced in the primary field are embedded in government documents, strategies and initiatives. In this sense, studying the interface between the primary and recontextualising fields in this study can be crucial to any attempt to develop strategic interventions in shaping potential future directions for sport policy generally and policy for PESS in particular, in terms of identifying the regulative discourse in constructing and constituting policy.

## **Methodology**

By using qualitative content analysis, this study examined how government's sports policies and strategies centred on PESSCL/PESSYP created the possible forms PESS might take in the 2000s in England, by identifying the dominant discourses that feature within policies and strategies for PESS as well as within media forms through an analysis of newspapers.

### *Using policy documents and newspapers as data*

Texts, which are normally written material, are not simply “delivery systems” of “fact” (Apple 1993, 46). Texts always consider the idea and purpose of intertextuality, and reveal an underlying social reality, offering windows on understanding the nature of the world (i.e. ontology) and how it can be known (i.e. epistemology) (Bryman, 2008). Policy documents embody certain kinds of discourse, and only particular agendas or discourses are recognised at any point in time with an authoritative allocation of values, including competing perspectives of PESS. Correspondingly, analysing policy text is concerned with identifying the particular perspective or point of view as the main theme and pattern from which the social world is presented (Fairclough 2003). In this study, six policy documents were selected for analysis on the basis of their relevance to policies for physical education in the 2000s (See Table 1).

**Table 1 Policy documents**

Year	Document	Department/Agency	Context
2000/April	<b>A Sporting Future for All</b>	DCMS	Outlined a commitment to the development of PESSCL
2002/March	<b>Game Plan</b> <i>A strategy for delivering Government's sport and physical activity objectives</i>	DCMS & Strategy Unit	
2003/March	<b>Learning through PE and Sport</b>	DfES, DCMS	Set out PESSCL

	<i>A guide to the physical Education, School Sport and Club Links Strategy</i>		
2004/March	<b>High Quality PE and Sport for Young People</b> <i>A guide to recognizing and achieving high quality PE and sport in schools and clubs</i>	DfES, DCMS	
2008/June	<b>Playing to Win</b> <i>A New Era for Sport</i>	DCMS	Set out PESSYP
2009/October	<b>The PE and Sport Strategy for Young People</b> <i>A Guide to Delivering the Five Hour Offer</i>	Sport England Youth Sport Trust	

The language of media constructs our knowledge and plays a crucial role in recontextualising public issues including diverse discourses that construct and constitute sport policy (Hargreaves 1986). In particular, the media are much more likely to function as a recontextualising agency to link policy-maker and audiences drawing on a range of discourses from the primary field as well as the recontextualising field. In line with the media's dual function in the recontextualising field, as both an active agency in the recontextualising process and as a producer of texts that constitute the recontextualising process, one of the major powers of the media is to reinforce dominant discourses and facilitate and legitimate the embedding of these discourses within policy in this case for PESS.

Using the NewsBank website (which provides full-text content of local media and newspapers) this paper used articles from the popular national newspapers including *BBC*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, and *Daily Mail* related to PESS policy. Regarding the selection of media artifacts, it was considered important to keep political balance in terms of the left

and right wings of Politics. In general, *The Guardian* might be viewed as centre left in its political position, *The Telegraph* as centre right, *Daily Mail* as right, and BBC as centre, so articles were collected from these sources. The articles were collected from 1999 to 2010 (n=467), using the keywords ‘physical education’, ‘school sport’, ‘sport policy’, ‘school sport partnership’, ‘PESSCL and PESSYP’.

### *Qualitative content analysis*

Qualitative content analysis (Halperin & Heath 2012) was applied to investigate text-type materials like policy documents and media artifacts such as newspapers, in order to explore the meanings underlying texts. Qualitative content analysis has been seen as ‘a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns’ to illustrate the range of the meanings of the phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, 1278). In order to define the unit of analysis, this paper used individual themes which were expressed in a single word, a sentence and a paragraph.

Overall this paper followed two main forms of coding for more meaningful analysis: initial coding and focused coding (Charmaz 2006). Initial coding includes detailed data and generates as many ideas and codes as necessary to contain the data, and is focused on emerging new concepts or categories through theoretical sampling. The initial coding created a protocol for identifying categories, which was used to develop and validate the coding scheme early in the analysis process.

While the initial coding identifies categories at a low level of abstraction as descriptive labels, focused coding is more concerned with categories at a higher level of abstraction

(Charmaz 2006). The data are re-explored and re-evaluated in terms of developing codes to elaborate themes embedded within policy documents and newspapers. For instance, in this study, lower level concepts such as ‘obesity’, ‘physical activity’ and ‘active lifestyle’ were grouped together to form the discourse of health. In addition, a certain relationship between lower level categories was identified (for example the relationship between youth obesity and health costs in the future), which allowed us to examine how these categories linked together (see Figure 3). There were five main emerging conceptual themes informing policy documents and media materials that emerged as a result of the initial and focused coding: sport, health, citizenship, lifelong participation and Olympic legacy. Thus, the five themes discussed in the findings represented the final results of the qualitative content analysis.

### **Five discourses constructing and constituting policy for PESS**

This paper identifies five discourses active during the first decade of the 2000s. These are sources of policy for PESS that were constructed in the recontextualising field, a process of construction which is fundamentally concerned with the pedagogisation of discourses into a form that is concerned with teaching, learning, curriculum and their assessment. Recontextualising agencies/agents for policy-making articulated PESS and drew on these five discourses to create links and relationships to establish complex web of significations around and in PESS.

#### *Sport discourse*

Within physical culture in the UK, sport became part of the broader cultural fabric of life from the end of the Second World War (Hill 2002). The field of sport has since then become a more complex part of society with regards to its globalization, professionalization and

commercialization (Kirk 2010).

Sport discourse was the most dominant throughout PESSCL and PESSYP, in which two sub-discourses were central: participation in competitive sport and talent development. In addition, sport discourse appeared to be the largest set of practices in the primary field of knowledge production and provided resources upon which other discourses such as health, citizenship and Olympic legacy drew. It is clear that the focus on competitive sport was central in sport policy documents in the period under study and was prominent in media articles to the extent that the BBC saw competition as ‘absolutely essential in school’ (BBC, May 23, 2003). This is manifestly demonstrated by the statement of former Secretary of DCMS, Andy Burnham, who commented that:

Sport’s power to captivate is unlocked in the thrill and drama of competition. I want people of all backgrounds and ability levels to experience the joy and friendship that competitive sport brings. My aim is clear and simple- to create a healthy ‘Playing to win’ culture in English sport by creating competitive opportunities for all (DCMS 2008, 2).

The importance of competition for young people was particularly prominent in *Playing to win* (DCMS 2008) and in this sense, PESSYP introduced ‘competition’ and ‘coaching’ strands which reinforced the importance of competitive sport through the creation of competition manager posts, coaching and intra-school competition (Sport England and Youth Sport Trust 2009). In line with the emphasis on competitive sport, schools were urged to take responsibility for providing competitive chances for young people through making school sport a ‘top priority’ (BBC, September 28, 1999).

The development of youth sport ‘talent’ was another core concept of PESSCL/PESSYP and media in relation to a close connection between PESS and elite sport development. Developing the sport talent of young people was linked to competitive school sport in an

exclusive way throughout PESSCL/PESSYP. In other words, a variety of initiatives introduced by PESSCL/PESSYP were de-located and reworked from sport discourse combined with competition (sports) and talent development produced in the primary field. For instance, the strategies included a distinct Gifted and Talented strand of PESSCL/PESSYP including profiling and tracking of talented sport players, a national network of Competition Managers, a national competition scheme, elite disability sport, multi-skill camps, multi-sport clubs and a National School Sport Week, in order to improve performance and increase success rates in top level competition (DfES and DCMS 2003; DCMS 2008).

Specifically, the significance of PESS in line with particular connections between competitive sport and talent development was easily demonstrated within both sites of policy-making and media production. It appeared to be common for government politicians and media commentators to refer to elite sport development by means of emphasising a need for (competitive) school sport. For example, the first Labour sport strategy *A Sporting Future for All* (DCMS 2000) restated the priorities of youth sport as a necessary foundation for future elite performance and international success. The policy document *Game Plan* (DCMS and Strategy Unit 2002) proposed to support Gifted and Talented pupils in school in terms of School Sport Partnerships Programme. Furthermore, this pervasive diffusion of sport discourse was demonstrated by reference to media reports containing politicians' statements and evaluation research regarding the role of school and sport initiatives related to elite sport development (e.g. Selvey, *The Guardian* August 28, 2007).

### *Health discourse*



Health is a symbol through which various meanings associated with individual life and social well-being are given expression (Kirk & Colquhoun 1989). In recent years, health has become one of the major topics of research in a range of disciplines. Health is a focus for major industries across the world and a matter of political concern (Evans et al. 2004).

The position of health discourse within PESSCL/PESSYP appeared to be relatively marginalised due to the dominance of the sport discourse, whilst policies for PESS of other western countries have been more constructed and constituted by health issues centred on increasing health-related fitness and activity levels (Fitzpatrick and Russell 2015). In contrast, the health concerns of young people was the most frequently discussed discourse in the media and, links were usually made here between inactivity and an alleged obesity epidemic. Media commentaries concerned about the positive effects of sport especially linked to tackling youth obesity would appear to have boosted investment in PESS from government (e.g. BBC, January 16, 2002).

The concept of 'obesity' was crucial to understanding how the health discourse is represented and addressed in policy and by media. Effectively, the obesity epidemic in the UK was emphasised by simply reporting or predicting the obesity rate of young people drawing on health-related research and making comparisons with other countries such as Europe and America (e.g. Hope, *Daily Mail* September 17, 2005). In addition, a sedentary lifestyle was constructed as a health risk factor associated with 'lifestyle disease' including hypertension, respiratory, type-2 diabetes and heart diseases in the future (DCMS and Strategy Unit 2002).

Regarding the future health concerns of young people, government and media reports directly connected the growing problem of obesity with National Health Service (NHS) costs in the future. In this context, Tony Blair highlighted the central importance of sport and physical activity in the foreword to *Game Plan* in terms of economic concerns:

This report focuses on the importance of increasing grassroots participation for health benefits, estimating that physical inactivity currently costs the nation at least £2bn a year (or 54,000 lives lost prematurely). (DCMS and Strategy Unit 2002, 5).

Accordingly, policy documents (especially *Game Plan*) and numerous media commentaries identified PESS to be a tool to ‘combat’ growing levels of obesity in school. In addition, the emphasis on concepts such as ‘active lifestyles’ or ‘healthy lifestyles’ suggested that young people would increasingly make personal choices and take responsibility for maintaining sport activity within their lives (Tinning 2010). According to *High Quality of PE and Sport for Young People*, young people should:

Understand that PE and sport are an important part of a healthy, active lifestyle. [...]

They can explain how the school helps them to maintain a healthy, active lifestyle (DfES and DCMS 2004, 6).

In sum, the structure of health discourse within policy documents and media commentaries demonstrated that the alleged increase in youth physical inactivity associated with sedentary living leads to an obesity epidemic which will result in increasing chronic diseases and at the same time increasing NHS costs. However, policy documents and media commentaries appeared to accept uncritically the role of PESS as a solution to the health crisis of young people. This generated critical issues on a narrow biological focus of health and ‘healthism’ (i.e. the idea that health is determined by body size and weight and a chain of signification of exercise – slenderness – health (Kirk & Colquhoun 1989)), while at the same time marginalising or ignoring critical voices such as criticisms of the unproblematic and simplistic association between physical activity and youth obesity, and of healthism and socio-economic factors influencing obesity. Instead, overweight and obese children have

been portrayed in the media through diverse images of bad citizens who are ‘lazy’ and ‘worthless’ (e.g. Hope, *Daily Mail*, September 17, 2007).

### *Citizenship discourse*

In recent years, there has been increased public and political concern about the problem of anti-social behaviour among young people in the UK as well as in many other countries (Davies 2005). The articulation between sport and citizenship (especially the potential of sport to enhance moral development) has a long history from the Victorian public schools in Britain; for example, from the late 1800s, playing team sports in public schools was recognised as a valuable way to foster character development as well as respecting the social order (Kirk 2010).

From our analysis citizenship discourse is noticeable along with the other major discourses including sport and health during the 2000s in England. This can be seen as an additional discourse to Kirk’s (1999) three physical culture discourses, i.e. sport, health and active leisure which he argued were the main ‘legitimizing publics’ (Williams 1985, 408) for the social construction of forms of school physical education.

Citizenship represented in both PESSCL/PESSYP and media can be understood from the prevailing belief in the potential role of sport to develop both personal and social positive youth development, which includes improving volunteering and cutting crime as well as encouraging educational attainment and rising academic standards across the whole school. Interestingly, the discourse of citizenship was more centrally and formally represented in policy by using key language such as ‘volunteering’, ‘social cohesion’, ‘attendance’, ‘leadership’, ‘teamwork’, and ‘responsibility’ (e.g. DCMS 2000, 7). In addition, the key psychological concepts such as ‘self-esteem’, ‘confidence’, ‘self-discipline’ and ‘motivation’

were linked to citizenship and were argued to contribute to better youth behaviour and improvements in educational standards within policy documents (e.g. DfES and DCMS 2003, 1). The media was also found to contribute to making a strong connection between competitive sport and citizenship by reiterating similar arguments, for example, that competition is ‘essential’ (BBC, May 23, 2003) and ‘key’ (Selvey, *The Guardian*, August 28, 2007) to changing youth lifestyle through valuable lessons about teamwork and commitment.

In particular, the explicit link between *Step into Sport*, which was one of the key strands of PESSCL and PESSYP, and citizenship was highlighted in the policy document *Learning through PE and Sport*:

Step into Sport is encouraging children, young people and adults to begin and continue an involvement in sports leadership and volunteering [...] The programme has clear links to citizenship (DfES and DCMS 2003, 11).

Furthermore, this strategy initiative has been seen as a vehicle for reducing the anti-social behaviour of young people (DCMS and Strategy Unit 2002). For instance, the media used and reported on the SSC reports which discussed improving behaviour by tackling anti-social behaviour among teenage boys (e.g. Hall, *The Guardian*, August 25, 2004).

The explicit connection between raising academic standards through sport was a very powerful rhetoric to connect sport policy with education policy. In *Learning through PE and sport* it was also proposed that professional development seeks to:

Improve the understanding of how high quality PESS can be used as a tool for whole school improvement, particularly, in terms of attendance, behaviour management and attainment (DfES and DCMS 2003, 12).

Hence, it is claimed that PESS can develop students’ personal qualities, including ‘high levels

of dedication, attendance and positive behaviour such as fair play, which will have an impact on pupils' attitudes to school and learning juxtaposed with transferring whole school improvement' (DfES and DCMS 2003, 4). In other words, the positive association between PESS and academic performance was demonstrated here from a functionalist perspective (Eitle 2005), that is, sports provided useful skills such as organisation, time management, discipline and motivation which facilitate to future educational success.

### *Lifelong participation*

The foundation of lifelong participation is related to the concept of the transfer of learning between the school and life outside the school gates, fostering young people's motivation and confidence for a lifetime of involvement in sport and physical. The notion was captured in this statement by Tony Blair in *A Sporting Future for All* that: 'schools provide more and better sporting opportunities for our children, and encourage people to carry on taking part in sport beyond the school years' (DCMS 2000, 3).

As implied by the title, *the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links* strategy (PESSCL) emphasised lifelong participation through effective school-club links (DCMS and Strategy Unit 2002). Certain strands including the 'School/Club Links' in PESSCL/PESSYP appeared to be explicitly legitimated by the lifelong participation discourse (DfES and DCMS 2003, 2004). The government identified inadequate school-club links as a considerable 'problem of post school drop-out from youth sport participation' (DCMS and Strategy Unit 2002, 77). Likewise, former Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell stressed in the foreword to *Game Plan* that fostering strong links between school and club should be an essential role of School Sport Coordinators (i.e. experienced teachers from secondary schools, who are released from a teaching timetable two days a week to allow them to be the School Sport Coordinators) to

‘tackle the larger drop-off’ in the number of young people involved in sport outside school (DCMS and Strategy Unit 2002, 8). The commentaries in the media also warned about the drop-off of young people after they leave school by means of providing survey statistics such as from the UK school sport survey.

The term ‘lifelong participation’ has been used in PESSCL/PESSYP as an umbrella concept for references to ‘active lifestyle’ juxtaposed with the discourses of health. Recreational activities, such as swimming, aerobics and cycling, play a crucial role in providing the range of physical activities in which young people are engaged. *A Sporting Future for All* suggested that more young people need to:

Take part in the whole range of activity recreation, from competitive sport to non-competitive activities such as fitness exercise, dance and countryside walking for lifelong participation (DCMS 2000, 37).

In this context, the government introduced ‘Extending Activities’ in 2008 as one of the strands of PESSYP, to provide young people with diverse activities.

### *Olympic legacy*

The term Olympic legacy is relatively new within the Olympic lexicon. ‘Legacy’ is a complicated concept and there remains a lack of agreement on the range of its meanings, but generally it is related to the infrastructural benefits (i.e. tangible and hard legacy) and non-infrastructural benefits (i.e. intangible and soft legacy) linked to hosting Olympic events (Girginov and Hills 2009).

An Olympic legacy was somewhat different from those discourses previously identified as it is not only an outcome of the London 2012 Games but also had outcomes of its own that

could be articulated with elements of the discourses of sport, citizenship, health, and lifelong participation. In other words, Olympic legacy discourse consisted in reality of a very broad set of concepts because it was closely linked with elite sport development as well as the discourses of health and citizenship in terms of sport development and participation legacy. It was prominent within *Game Plan* and *Playing to win*. In particular, *Playing to win* (DCMS 2008), as its title implied, strongly emphasised the importance of the London Games in terms of achieving elite sport success, using crucial language such as ‘world leading sporting nation’ and ‘world leading physical education and school sport system’, which is consequently used to justify and legitimate more competitive sport in school physical education.

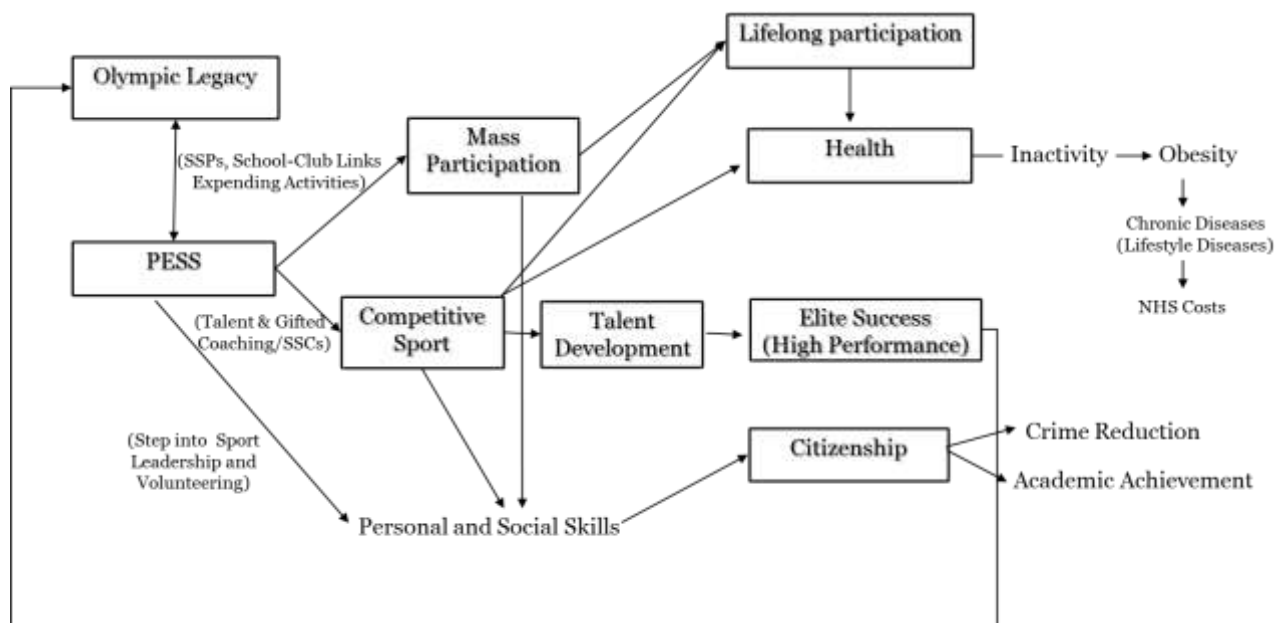
The PESSYP was clearly focused on delivering a PSA which aimed to ‘deliver a successful Olympic Games with a sustainable legacy and get more children and young people taking part in high quality physical education and sport’ (Sport England and Youth Sport Trust 2009, 4). In addition, some strands of PESSYP emerged as a result of the successful Games bid, such as an event volunteering strand in *Step into Sport*. Other initiatives such as the UK School Games and the Young Ambassador programmes have emerged in the context of PESSYP.

In addition, media played a crucial role in reinforcing the articulations surrounding an Olympic legacy centred on the language of ‘inspiring young people.’ in the recontextualising field. In media, talent development discourse was evoked and more explicitly connected to the 2012 Games in terms of enlarging the pool of talent through the Olympic legacy which inspires more young people to participation in sport. In particular, PESS was identified as a strategy that supports the achievement of the Olympic legacy and thus the relationships between these concepts are symbiotic.

### **The complexity of discourses: Web of significations within PESSCL and PESSYP**

The Labour government stressed that their aim for policy for PESS was ‘simple’, in so far as they sought to provide more competitive opportunities as well as high quality physical education for all young people (DCMS 2000, 2008). The main official evaluation studies of PESSCL/PESSYP also reported that the strategies had a substantial positive impact on the range of opportunities for participation by young people (e.g. Ofsted 2009; Quick et al. 2009). However, policies and strategies for PESS is not simple. As can be seen in Figure 3, each element of the five discourses this paper identified shows the development of complex web of significations constituting and constructing PESSCL/PESSYP. PESSCL/PESSYP was anchored in web of significations in terms of complex connections between elements of discourses. The relationships between PESS and talent development, health and citizenship appeared to be much more complex than the assumed benefits stated within policy documents and media commentaries. They form what Stuart Hall (1985) called (in another context) a ‘structure-in-dominance’ and, in this case sport is the dominant discourse within the web of significations.





**Figure 3 Web of signification within PESSCL and PESSYP**

This contingent relationship in policy documents means there is no guarantee PESS will lead to either a healthier population (Fitzpatrick and Russell 2015) or better civic behaviour (Coalter 2007) or academic achievement (Macdonald et al 2014) or elite sporting success (Lamb and Lane 2013). Thus, these combinations did ideological work through a selective drawing on knowledge from the primary field into the recontextualising process, by making contingent relationships appear to be logically necessary. For instance, there was no clear and robust evidence for such claims about the benefits of sport for citizenship and academic achievement due to a lack of a developed rationale to justify measuring specific outcomes of PESSCL/PESSYP (Coalter 2007; Eitle 2005).

In particular, as shown earlier, sport discourse was the most dominant and pervasive discourse constructing and constituting policy for PESS. This means a dominant, games-oriented form of PESS has not changed since at least the 1990s (Kirk 2010). The dominant sport discourse was arguably incompatible with other policy objectives such as health, citizenship and education (Siedentop 2002). For instance, both PESSCL/PESSYP did not suggest any specific programme in relation to health promotion such as health-related

exercise (Cale and Harris 2013). Moreover, the aspiration of lifelong participation raised complex issues because of the continued dominance of competitive sports in PESS. Kirk (2010) suggests that the dominant sport-based form of PESS has failed to prepare young people for lifelong participation because the vast majority of adults do not take part regularly in competitive team sports. Further, and more importantly, the form of sport games-based practice deprives many children, especially girls, of the opportunity to develop competences to participate in sport and physical activity. Therefore the (over) emphasis on competitive sport detracted from the goal of lifelong participation and, in this regard, the discourse of lifelong participation existed in tension with the dominant competitive sport discourse. Furthermore, it is argued that some discourses such as creativity in and through movement, for example, were more or less entirely missing. There was no mention in PESSCL/PESSYP of creativity and expression or the explicit use of physical education for moral development, with forms of dance and other movement forms, and of meditative and martial arts not featuring prominently in policy.

## **Conclusion**

Applying a theoretical framework adapted from Bernstein's social construction of pedagogic discourse approach to educational policy sociology, this paper has examined the dominant discourses constructing and constituting policies and strategies for PESS, centred on PESSCL/PESSYP, within Bernstein's recontextualising field. During the decade under review, these were the discourses of sport, health, citizenship, lifelong participation, and Olympic legacy. This study has sought to show the complexity of discourses and the ways in which a range of different ideological effects were active through the processes of their articulation within web of significations. As this paper noted, the policies and strategies for

PESS appeared to offer a limited range of possibilities for the instructional discourse of PESS within a 'structure-in-dominance' (Hall 1985), where sport formed the dominant discourse.

Building on the findings of this study, this paper suggests that, whilst PESSCL/PESSYP had a positive impact on increasing pupils' participation and expanding the number of sports offered in schools (Quick et al. 2009), the strategies appeared to reinforce competitive sports-oriented practices in schools. The ways of thinking about what PESS might be were constructed and constituted by a limited number of discourses. In other words, the policy process within the recontextualising field created the possibility of some forms of PESS while making other (arguably equally legitimate) forms unthinkable and therefore impossible to implement in practice within the secondary field. Arguably, and to give an example, the discourses of sport, lifelong participation, health and citizenship did little to create the possibility for forms of PESS that were child-centred and concerned principally with creativity in movement. In this sense, these inclusions and exclusions of discourses were all politically charged, and would have an impact on the quality of young people's education at the time and on their life chances in the future. Moreover, the demise of PESS initiatives in 2010 as the result of the withdrawal of funding for school sport in the Coalition government reflected the highly politicised nature of policy-making for PESS (Phillpots and Grix 2014). While we must await further research on the legacy of these discourses and their advocates and protagonists, we might argue at this time that the first decade of the 2000s has been powerfully formative of any possible forms PESS might take for many years to come.

Finally, we must not lose sight of the powerful discourses produced in the primary field that will continue to be appropriated by agents/agencies in the recontextualising field, which have an impact on shaping forms of policy and practice in PESS. Furthermore, drawing on this study, it is further suggested that we need to explore in detail forms of PESS in schools in

order to achieve alignment in the school practices with current forms of physical culture beyond sport such as health and citizenship, which can be a foundation for physical educators to clarify the contribution of PESS to the educational goals of schools and to other social goals. In this regard, there is a need for further research to explore the process of how to best achieve quality PESS through carefully and precisely targeted interventions in order for young people to learn citizenship, foster health improvement and facilitate lifelong participation in physical activities.

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